

UNCLASSIFIED

H98

ACTION EUR-00

RELEASED IN FULL

INFO LOG-00 AMAD-00 INL-00 PDI-00 UTED-00 VCI-00 H-00
TEDE-00 INR-00 IO-00 LAB-01 VCIE-00 GIWI-00 DOHS-00
IRM-00 BBG-00 R-00 ECA-00 DRL-00 G-00 SAS-00
/001W

-----97A9AD 231344Z /38

P 231339Z FEB 06
FM AMEMBASSY VIENNA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2481
OSD WASHDC PRIORITY
WHITEHOUSE WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS VIENNA 000557

DEPT FOR EUR/AGS, INR/EU, AND EUR/PPD FOR LISBETH KEEFE

OSD FOR COMMANDER CHAFFEE

WHITEHOUSE FOR NSC/WEUROPE

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: KPAO, AU, OPRC

SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS: February 23, 2006

EU Wants to Step on the Brake

1. The Austrian EU presidency and the EU Commission want to reduce the number of deadly accidents on Europe's streets, writes centrist daily "Die Presse." Next week, the EU Ministers of Transportation will discuss appropriate measures at a meeting in Bregenz. This Thursday, the EU Commission will present its own contribution - the intelligent vehicle - which includes automatic brakes that prevent among others rear-end collisions, an electronic navigation system, and a wake-up system for the driver. However, these are not the only measures the EU has in mind when it comes to making streets safer. Independent daily "Salzburger Nachrichten" reports on EU Commissioner for Transportation Jacques Barrot's proposal to introduce EU-wide speed limits that are lower than the speed of 160 that Austrian Minister of Transportation Hubert Gorbach is planning to introduce in parts of Carinthia. The Commissioner also favors a policy of "zero tolerance" to reduce the number of lethal accidents.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

----- Incentives for More Children -----

2. While Minister for Welfare Ursula Haubner considers child allowances for lower-income families important, she is also convinced that higher-income families need more support. In an interview with independent daily "Der Standard," Haubner said that women with a university degree tend to have fewer children and pointed out that more ought to be done to encourage reproduction in this target group. One possibility would be to scrap the limits imposed on the amount of money those women are allowed to earn in addition to their child allowance. Another possibility would be to make the cost of child care tax-deductible. According to Haubner, children are an option for all social classes, provided that "having children is considered worthwhile in a society." The Minister favors a "partnership between politics and industry" in this respect and said that first steps in the direction of compatibility of family and job have been taken.

----- 50TH Opera Ball in Vienna -----

3. Oel morning radio news reports on the 50th Viennese opera ball since 1945 that is taking place tonight. The anniversary coincides nicely with the Mozart year and the latter's music will dominate the ball, which will be visited by many high-ranking politicians and other celebrities from Austria and abroad. The ball will take place under the patronage of Austrian President Heinz Fischer, and Chancellor Wolfgang Schuessel will receive IAEA boss and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Mohammed ElBaradei in his loge.

----- Doping Also Threatens Salzburg's Bid -----

4. Headlines semi-official daily "Wiener Zeitung" in reference to the escalating scandal surrounding part of Austria's ski team at the Winter Olympics in Turin. While the result of doping tests that were conducted last Saturday on Austrian biathletes and cross-country skiers are still outstanding, IOC President Jacques Rogge has found strong words of criticism for Austria - according to him, tests are not even needed to show that doping has been used.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

Independent daily "Salzburger Nachrichten" even mentions the possibility of an Austrian disqualification. The IOC has meanwhile demanded a comprehensive investigation of the case and Austria is willing to comply - on Wednesday, the Austrian Olympic Committee has announced its intention to establish a commission that should shed light on the affair. The President of the Austrian Economic Chamber, Christoph Leitl has already warned of far-reaching consequences of the scandal - according to him, the affair could harm Salzburg's bid for the Winter Olympics in 2014, writes "Die Wiener Zeitung."

----- New Violence After Attacks on Shiite Sanctum -----

5. Austrian media report on the renewed flare-up of violence in Iraq after an attack on the Golden Mosque of Samarra, one of the most important Shiite sanctums, which was severely damaged as a consequence. Apparently as an act of revenge, persons in police uniforms then attacked a prison in the town of Basra in the southern part of Iraq and lynched at least ten Sunni Muslims that were held to be insurgents, writes ORF online. Tens of thousands of religious believers took to the streets all over Iraq to protest against the terror in the country, thereby attacking at least 90 Sunni mosques. In a dramatic appeal, Iraq's President Dschalal Talabani warned of a civil war in the country. The Shiite government charges Sunni rebels that are associated with al-Qaida in Iraq with the attack on the Shiite sanctum.

----- Mladic: Del Ponte Demands More Pressure on Belgrade -----

6. Independent daily "Der Standard" writes about the alleged war criminal and former General Ratko Mladic, who remains elusive despite reports of his capture on Tuesday. The daily quotes UN Chief Prosecutor Carla Del Ponte as saying that Mladic had not been arrested but was "undoubtedly in Serbia." At the same time, Del Ponte demanded that the EU increase pressure on Belgrade. The Union could postpone its negotiations with Serbia about an agreement that could lead to a future Serbian EU membership if Mladic is not extradited soon, Del Ponte suggested, according to "Der Standard." The brittle Serbian minority government was in a difficult situation with the Kosovo negotiations, and with the upcoming referendum in Montenegro

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

about its independence, and could not afford to close the door to Europe, Del Ponte said in an interview with the daily.

Information on CIA Overflights Lacking

7. An interim report of the EU Council in Strasbourg was presented by Secretary General Tony Davis on Wednesday. Five of the 46 member states of the European Council have not met their deadlines for supplying information on illegal CIA overflights and secret prisons and other responses had been of little informational value, he complained, according to mass circulation daily "Kurier." Not to supply the requested information was a clear breach of the convention that guarantees the protection of human rights on the continent, Davies reminded the five countries. Independent daily "Der Standard" reports that Swiss European Council Special Investigator Dick Marty is due to testify before the investigation committee of the European Parliament this Thursday. Marty had charged the US with having prisoners tortured abroad.

Quarrel About US Ports in Arab Hands

8. Titles independent daily "Der Standard" in reference to the mounting criticism from both political parties of the planned takeover of important US ports by the Arab company Dubai Ports World. Despite massive protests and a vehement security debate, President Bush intends to stick to his plan, sending out high-ranking cabinet secretaries to different talk shows to appease the criticism and announcing his veto if the Congress should try to block his decision. However, the optics of the deal and the lack of instinct in such a sensitive matter could have long-term consequences, damaging the Republicans' chances in the November mid-term elections, concludes "Der Standard."

McCaw

NNNN

UNCLASSIFIED